

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

January 14, 2026

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser, Kim Vogel, Mike Lunn

Members Absent:

Guests Present: Slater Turner (FS), Robbie Piehl (FS), Kyle Hensley (BLM), Jodie Schiffman (Oregon Living with Fire),

Public Present: John Breese, Laura York, Gayle Hunt

Meeting was called to order @ 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill moved to approve the December 17, 2025 meeting minutes as corrected. Kim seconded. Votes Aye: Bill, Lynne, Calista, Frank, Mike, Melinda, Steve, Cliff, Kim. No: None. Motion Passed.

Agency Updates:

Robbie Piehl, Interim District Ranger, Ochoco National Forest Rager District provided updates for Rager District. FS is still working on the plans for the north slope project discussed at the December 2025 meeting. For the permittees whose allotments were impacted by the 2024 fires, the FS is still working on finding funds to complete the fencing projects. Robbie reported that some of the permittees are helping with the reconstruction projects.

Robbie shared that the FS is able to hire temporary seasonal fire fighters. There is a current hiring freeze on all other seasonal hiring. Nationwide, the FS is currently 2000 FTE over budget allowance. If there is any exception to the hiring freeze, it will probably be in the recreation area. Currently, the Ochoco Forest is missing 2 silviculturists, making it difficult to meet timber sales/harvest goals. Resources are being shared with the Deschutes Forest and other Forests to help with the planning expertise.

Slater Turner, District Ranger, Crooked River National Grasslands and Lookout Mtn District, reported on activities on the Lookout Ranger District and National Grasslands. For permits on the Maury Mtns and impacted by the Wiley Flat Fire, all but 1 permittee has selected to take non-use for the 2026 grazing season. Slater reported that jackpot burning is scheduled on the Grasslands but they are waiting for additional moisture to arrive before starting. 70 plus acres near Skull Hollow on the grasslands plus some areas up McKay Creek. The McKay burns could impact air quality in Prineville.

Kyle Hensley, Central Oregon Area Manager, Prineville BLM District shared that the Department of Interior has initiated a reorganization of all USDI agencies, pooling all fire fighting resources into a newly

created wildlife firefighting agency, the US Wildland Fire Service. Kyle shared he did not believe that for the 2026 fire season, there would be no real changes for those on the ground.

For the FY2026 year, Kyle reported that all winter burning targets have already been met. The District is exploring additional opportunities to implement still this winter.

For the Deschutes Resource Area, Kyle reported that there has been an application received for a special recreation use permit in the Millican Plateau area. The permit is for the ability to conduct private, commercial UTV tours in the area.

District wide, BLM continues to work on the update of the weed management plan. 7 comments were received during the scoping phase.

BLM is working with NRCS and SWCD's for 2 possible virtual fencing projects. The objective of these projects would be to enhance the ability to manage livestock for targeted grazing on annual grasses. BLM is working on a possible timber project near Big Summit Prairie. Planning to possibly begin in 2027.

The Prineville District is authorized to hire 6 seasonal positions. Positions are to focus on the timber and grazing programs. If additional authority to hire comes, recreation would be the target area for those positions.

For the South Fork Crooked River, Kyle is proposing a field trip later this spring/early summer. The purpose of the field trip would be to see in person, the resource issues that are of concern within this planning area. Livestock grazing is still being rested for 2 more years. Wild horse use and trespass grazing issues would be discussed. The Committee is interested in participating and Tim will work with Kyle to find dates and work on logistics. Kyle reported that there is no timeframe yet for the update of the Liggett Table Wild Horse Management Plan. For the BLM, there are 5 administrative priorities and updating wild horse management plans is not one of them.

Lynne asked about the use of virtual fencing for BLM allotments. Kyle shared that there are new opportunities but finding money for the towers, and determining how portable (movable) they can be is what they are working on now. Kyle reported that boundary fences built with actual fencing materials are still a requirement.

Kim asked about the new fire organization. She asked if it would be separated from all the land-based activities of the agency. Kyle reported that all USDI agencies are impacted by this implementation. The new chief of this agency will report directly to the Secretary of Interior.

New Business:

Review applications for Appointment to Committee

Tim shared with the Committee that there are 2 applicant for the 2 vacancies on the Committee. The County advertised these positions last fall (October – November, 2025). At the December, 2025 committee meeting, committee members voted to invite applicants to the January meeting to meet and ask questions.

Laura York is the first applicant. Laura was introduced to the Committee, shared her background as it related to committee work. Laura currently works for Oregon Department of Forestry. She has over 15 years of experience, working with issues connected to the management of natural resources here in Crook County. After introducing herself, the Committee had the opportunity to ask questions.

Lynne asked what intrigues you about the challenges and opportunities of committee work. Laura shared that the topics of wild horse management, landscape resiliency and timber management are examples of topics that interest her. Laura asked the Committee about the challenges it sees. Steve responded that the changes in federal agency structure and operation creates uncertainty in how the Committee will be able to interact with them.

Kim asked about Laura's budget experience, particularly as it works to create funding partnerships to get things done. With Federal agency budgets declining, what opportunities exist? Laura shared that she thought partnerships strengthen funding opportunities.

Melinda asked about Laura's current employment and if she thought there might be any potential conflicts of interest. Laura said that her membership on the Committee would be as a citizen of Crook County and not as an employee of ODF. During meetings, Laura would be taking time off from her ODF job.

Steve asked Laura, as a member of the Committee, how would you approach challenges and what did she think was an important natural resource. She shared that forests are what she thinks of and that she views forests and range as different resources, and requirements to manage them differently. Challenges are best addressed by listening to the information, reading and discussing topics.

Laura asked if the Committee was dealing with any issues currently and how to topics come before the Committee. Currently there are not any single issues being addressed by the Committee. Topics come before the Committee either through public input, Committee members being topics before the Committee, topics forward by the County Commissioners or by Agencies themselves.

Melinda asked what expertise Laura would bring to the Committee. Laura responded that her familiarity with the Oregon Forest Practices Act and forest management practices would be applicable to the Committee.

The other candidate is Andy Gallagher. Andy was on the Committee and his term expired on December 31, 2025. Andy could not be present today due to other commitments. The Committee discussed Andy's active participation as a Committee member.

In discussion, Mike shared that he was positive about both applicants. Kim shared that she thought Andy's continued involvement was important.

Frank moved to recommend both Laura York and Andy Gallagher to the County Commission for appointments to 4 year terms. Kim seconded. Vote: Yes: Steve, Calista, Kim, Bill, Mike, Cliff, Melinda, Lynne, Frank. Vote no: None. Motion passed unanimously.

Good of the Order.

Tim shared that he will be in Washington, DC during the week of February's regular meeting. The Committee was given the option to either move the February meeting to February 18 or to cancel the February meeting. After discussion, Kim moved to cancel the February meeting and meet in March, 2nd Wednesday of the month. Calista seconded. Votes: Yes: Frank, Steve, Bill, Lynne, Kim, Melinda, Calista, Mike, Cliff. Vote no: None. Motion carried.

Tim noted that elections for Chair and Vice-Chair positions will be held at the March meeting.

Public Comment:

Jodie Schiffman, Oregon Living with Fire addressed the Committee about OLWF activities and resources available to private landowners in regard to grant writing skills and fire rehab grants available. Dr. Jenna Fenton who lives in Klamath Falls is the co-facilitator of OLWF and is available to help with grant writing. Her contact information is Jenniferfenton5@yahoo.com. Jodie also shared additional information to the reorganization of USDI wildland fire service. Secretarial Oregon 3448 was issued to formalize the new agency. Jodie will share with Tim the order for sharing with the entire Committee. Jodie shared that the Forest Service, housed within the US Department of Agriculture, would not be a part of this new agency. That effort would require an act of Congress.

Jodie shared some upcoming workshops the Committee might be interested in. Adapting with Fire is a workshop being held at Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, Washington (March 4 – 6, 2026), Wildland Urban Interface Conference, Reno, Nevada (March 24-26, 2026) and the Central Oregon TRECS training for prescribed fire will be held in May at the Rocksprings Ranch in Tumalo.

Calista moved to adjourn the meeting. Bill seconded. Votes yes: Frank, Steve, Calista, Lynne, Kim, Melinda, Bill, Mike, Cliff. Votes No: none. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.